

Continuing progress on Sacramento's flood protection

By Doris O. Matsui
SPECIAL TO THE BEE

Because Sacramento sits at the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers, heavy rain can mean more than bad weather. Most of us can recall just how close we came to disaster with the major floods of 1986 and 1997. Schools and portions of I-5 closed while water lapped at levee tops near Campus Commons. With Sacramento as the hub of a six-county region that provides jobs for 2 million people, a major flood along the rivers would cripple this economy, cause billions of dollars in direct property damages and likely result in loss of life.

But Sacramento has a plan, through improvements to Folsom Dam, to attain the 200-year level flood protection necessary to minimize the possibility of such events. This solution is the result of a hard-won bipartisan agreement crafted in 2003 by the late U.S. Rep. Robert T. Matsui, D-Sacramento, and U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville.

This 2003 agreement would improve water infrastructure and supply, and as part of the project to raise Folsom Dam, it would construct a permanent bridge to replace Folsom Dam Road. And it would build upon Army Corps of Engineers' projects already being carried out to strengthen American River levees and to modify Folsom Dam to improve its performance.

Despite recent news about the corps' miscalculations on project costs for Folsom Dam modifications, which have increased significantly since the original estimate, this plan is the only viable road map to provide protection against the potential catastrophe of the inevitable flood.

Let me be very clear: These projects can and will move forward.

In meetings with top corps officials both in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., over the past weeks, I shared my concern and disappointment with their

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failure to properly estimate the cost of the Folsom modifications portion of the project. But after conferring with the state and local partners responsible for flood protection in the region, it has become clear that the corps' mistake will not deter us from working through the issues to keep the Folsom modifications on track. In terms of lives saved and property protected, we can afford to do no less.

I have asked for the corps to continue progress toward Sacramento's flood control goal: 200-year protection. I believe a comprehensive review of all authorized Folsom Dam projects will prove cost-effective and ultimately result in an improved project to address flood control needs.

For its part, the corps must ensure that maximum cost-saving measures have been pursued and integrated. In addition I expect the corps to allow that review to shed light on the reasons for its miscalculations.

We have always known that attaining the necessary flood protection for Sacramento would be a long-term cooperative effort; the cost developments are just such a challenge, and we must not divert our attention from our end goal of protecting our families and our homes from the threat of flooding.

Working together this community will rise to this latest challenge, just as it has risen in the past to meet other challenges. And we will succeed: Sacramento will have the flood control 2 million people need and deserve.

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